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UNCLAS HARARE 001520

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR BNEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVELLE, D. TEITELBAUM
PARIS FOR C. NEARY

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ZI](#) [ZANU](#) [PF](#)

SUBJECT: ZANU-PF WINS SEKE BY-ELECTION THE EASY WAY --
UNOPPOSED

REF: A. HARARE 1444

[1](#)B. HARARE 1429

[1](#)1. (U) ZANU-PF candidate Phineas Chihota was declared the winner of the Seke parliamentary by-election on September 3 when no other candidate filed for the seat by that day,s deadline. The seat had become vacant following the death of MDC MP Bennie Tumbare-Mutasa in July. ZANU-PF now has 67 seats in parliament, bringing it to within two seats of the two-thirds majority needed to enact constitutional amendments. No election has as yet been scheduled to fill the seat of the recently deceased ZANU-PF MP Eddison Zvobgo (ref A), a seat ZANU-PF is certain to hold.

[1](#)2. (U) The official Herald newspaper reported on September 8 that the government adopted the draft Zimbabwe Electoral Commission Bill and plans to gazette it soon. The MDC continues to maintain that the draft bill does not meet its requirements for electoral reform (ref B).

[1](#)3. (SBU) COMMENT: This is the first election the MDC has sat out since declaring it would boycott elections unless electoral imbalances are addressed. This no doubt seemed to the MDC a low-risk implementation of the policy, since it was not likely an MDC candidate would have won the by-election. However, the failure of MDC to put up a candidate has given the government added material for its rhetoric to domestic and regional audiences that MDC is a spent force afraid even to contest elections. More worrisomely, it may also give the ruling party an opening to both criticize the MDC for inconsistency should it later choose to contest elections, including especially the general election in the spring, and to claim that by participating the MDC has endorsed the fairness of the election. Rather than putting pressure on the ZANU-PF, the MDC may have painted itself into a corner.
END COMMENT.
Dell